

## MEDIA AWARENESS NETWORK

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### Propaganda Techniques on Hate Web Sites

The term propaganda refers to persuasive techniques that attempt to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes or behaviour of a group of people. Propaganda itself is neither good nor bad – it's merely a means of persuasion and can be used for positive *or* negative purposes.



Through propaganda, hate groups manipulate words, images and associations

- to elicit feelings of superiority
- to exploit insecurities and fears in order to demonize "others"
- to represent their ideologies and beliefs as "truths"

On Web sites created by hate organizations, the following propaganda techniques are commonly used. These techniques may be combined to maximize the effectiveness and reach of hate messages.

#### Word Play and Name Calling

Hate groups play with words and language to frame themselves or their views in the best possible light. For example, it's not unusual for a white supremacist group to refer to its members as "racialists" – a word with less history and stigma than the word "racist." Old-fashioned name calling is used to dehumanize groups that are considered to be inferior, and to justify prejudicial beliefs.

#### Symbols and Imagery

Hate groups understand the power of symbols as a quick way to unite those who share an ideology, so symbols frequently appear on hate-based Web pages.

In order to legitimize and "brand" their organizations, it's not unusual for hate groups to co-opt mainstream symbols such as the Celtic cross, crowns and pagan runes.

#### Religious Authority

Many hate organizations – even those with no religious affiliations – use scripture and religious terminology to give the impression that their claims are sanctioned by God. For example, the head of a white supremacist organization might refer to himself as a "pastor," or group objectives might be referred to as "commandments."

#### Scientific Legitimacy

Use of science or medicine is another way for hate groups to "borrow" authority. This borrowing might include citing studies and academic works, or presenting ideology in pseudo-scientific language. Often, hate groups will present the works and research of like-minded organizations and individuals as unbiased, credible fact.

#### Nationalism

When white-power organizations refer to "nationalism" or "citizenship," it's usually in the context of "protecting" the white population from perceived threats from non-white immigrants. Hate groups also use positive associations with nationalism – loyalty, nobility, heritage and advocacy – to inspire people to "join the cause."

#### Fearmongering

Some hate sites use fearmongering to fuel beliefs that a particular group presents a danger to society. Examples include linking groups to crime, terrorism or disease.

### **Smoke and Mirror Tactics**

Not all hate sites present their views directly. In fact, many are quite subtle. For example, some attempt to discredit groups by linking them to crime or disease, instead of referring to the real source of their hatred, which is race. Other sites provide links to articles written by respected journalists or use statistics from organizations such as Statistics Canada to give an appearance of legitimacy. A good example is an online magazine that links to an article about lack of diversity on the television series *Friends*. Although the article is pro-diversity, it is followed by dozens of posts from "readers" who refute the author's claims.

### **Historical Revisionism**

Revisionists are those who present a "revised" version of historical events. Although they present themselves as unbiased academics, historical revisionists have been known to rearrange the facts in order to promote their own interpretations of history. The most common type of revisionists, are Holocaust deniers – individuals who argue that the Holocaust was less horrific than historical records indicate, or that it never happened at all.

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